

February 21, 2017

Dear Senator Paul M. Formica, Senator Catherine A. Osten and Representative Toni E. Walker, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of Connecticut's Even Start Director's Coalition, we are urging you to reinstate funding for the Even Start Program line item in the Office of Early Childhood budget. Even Start is a small but critical program that serves a targeted population of parents – English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Learners acquiring their GED and teen parents finishing their high school career. These parents are taking the steps necessary to obtain a livable wage in the workforce. There are Even Start programs in Middletown, New London and Torrington. About 100 families (parents and children) are served each year.

What makes Even Start unique is not only the population we serve, but that we are a nationally recognized two-generation learning program. To assess our work, we use a number of nationally recognized research based assessment tools. The long-term impact of our program on the participants is significant; attached you will find a report on the positive impacts.

The key components of our program are:

- **Adult Education/Workforce Development** - We offer parents educational opportunities that prepare them for the workforce by providing English as a Second Language classes to help parents acquire English language proficiency. Once parents graduate from this class, they can pursue higher education and workforce skills. In addition, Even Start connects adult learners to High School Credit and GED Diploma Programs. To further learning and establish a foundation for life long livable wages, Even Start offers onsite career exploration, training and college preparatory classes, job skills training, workforce education in areas that match local demand and show potential for growth through the I- BEST program.
- **Early Childhood Education** – While the parent is in adult education, the children participate in our high quality early learning program. Our goal is to engage parents with children in the first 1,000 days of their life when numerous developmental milestones are achieved and early intervention has the greatest impact. Currently, at best, an infant/toddler slot can cost from \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year in a National Association for the Education of Young Children accredited center making a high-quality early learning experience out-of-reach for our parents. But, with Even Start, their child has access to this kind of experience.
- **Family Engagement** - A parent educator works with the parent and child together to provide coaching and education about early literacy, parenting and developmentally appropriate milestones. Home visiting is incorporated, so learning is extended into the home. This component is what makes this program two-generational. Serving two generations separately with programming is not enough. This parenting piece is critical.

With our small amount of funding we do all of the above, and we also provide transportation for our families. Our young parent and dual language learner students have repeatedly said they could not have completed our program if these much needed supports were not in place. In communities that do not have a robust public transportation system, busing is a must and in those that do, vouchers are necessary. For a program with 15+ students, this could cost anywhere from 10,000-\$20,000 annually for the entire class.

This limited funding that Even Start receives is returned in more productive parents and better prepared children. In our program, recently, ten children under the age of 2 have been referred to services for speech and occupational therapy. This intervention would not have happened if the teachers and parent educators were not actively involved with not only helping the parent, but implementing the Ages & Stages with the child on a regular basis and developing a trusting relationship with the parent. This early identification and connection to needed supports earlier on in the child's life creates a positive fiscal note for the tax payers of Connecticut with eliminating potential future cost in special education programs and life-long needs.

For our participants, this program is life changing. It works. We have a number of parents who have submitted written testimonies about the program who will tell you how they are better prepared to participate in the economy, their children are off to a good start, and they are more effective parents.

Thank you for all you do help create positive outcomes for Connecticut families. We are available to provide more information or answer any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us. A copy of **Even Start's Results Based Accountability Report** and **Long Term Outcome Power Point Report** are attached for your review.

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Attachments